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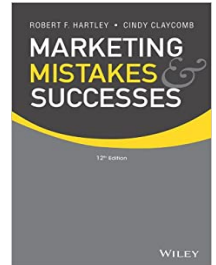


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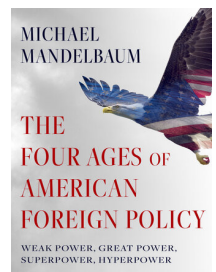
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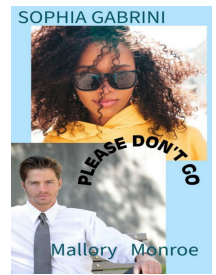
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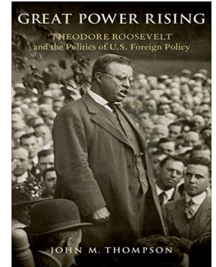
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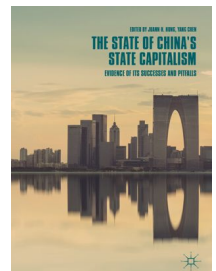
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EDITED BY

MALLORY E. COMPTON

PAUL 'T HART

GREAT POLICY SUCCESSES

OR, a tale about why it's amazing that governments
get so little credit for their many everyday
and extraordinary achievements as told by
sympathetic observers who seek to
create space for a less relentlessly
negative view of our pivotal
public institutions

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Great Policy Successes

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Each of the case chapters will also appear in abbreviated and modified form at the Public Impact Observatory website, an initiative from the Centre for Public Impact (CPI) that brings together hundreds of cases of public policy and public governance from across the world. We welcome the smooth cooperation with CPI, which serves to greatly increase the public and professional exposure that these cases will receive. Consult the observatory at: <https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/observatory/>.

Finally, a 'companion' volume devoted exclusively to policy successes in Australia and New Zealand has been produced in parallel to this global volume. It has been published as Jo Luetjens, Michael Mintrom, and Paul 't Hart (eds), *Successful Public Policy: Lessons From Australia and New Zealand* (Canberra: ANU Press 2019), and it too is an open access publication, with each case individually downloadable to facilitate inclusion in syllabi and course guides (see <https://press.anu.edu.au/publications/series/anzsog/successful-public-policy>). The New Zealand economic reform and 'Marvellous Melbourne' cases appear in both volumes. Paul 't Hart would like to thank his co-editor for that project, Michael Mintrom (Australia New Zealand School of Government and Monash University) and Jo Luetjens (Utrecht University) for their exemplary collaboration. The two projects have fed off each other, and it has been a joy working on both.

Utrecht
July 2019

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1

How to ‘See’ Great Policy Successes

A Field Guide to Spotting Policy Successes in the Wild

Mallory E. Compton and Paul ‘t Hart

Shifting Focus

For those wanting to know how public policy is made and how it evolves from aspirations and ideas to tangible social outcomes, the 1970s produced some classic accounts, which became established in academic curriculums and part of the canon of academic research world-wide. The two best known works from this era are Pressman and Wildavsky’s *Implementation* (whose iconic epic subtitle inspired ours) and Peter Hall’s *Great Planning Disasters* (the inspiration for our book’s main title). Pressman and Wildavsky wrote a book-length intensive case study revealing how a federal employment promotion policy, which was launched with a great sense of urgency and momentum, played out on the ground with very limited effect in Oakland, California. Hall presented gripping accounts of public policy failures from around the Anglosphere: ‘positive’ planning disasters (planning projects that ran into cost escalation, underperformance, withdrawal of political support, or unintended consequences so big as to completely dwarf the intended aims), and ‘negative’ planning disasters (instances where plans made in response to pressing public problems never got off the drawing board due to political stalemate).

Taken together, these studies were emblematic of an era in which the alleged ‘ungovernability’ of Western societies and their welfare states was a dominant theme (Crozier et al. 1975; Rose 1979; Offe 1984). Having seized a much more prominent role in public life following the Second World War, Western governments were ambitious to achieve planned change, but internal complexities and vagaries of democratic political decision-making often thwarted those ambitions. Generations of public policy and public administration students were steeped in pessimistic diagnoses from these classic studies. Waves of similar studies in the 1990s (Butler et al. 1994; Bovens and ‘t Hart 1996; Gray and ‘t Hart 1998) and the 2010s (Allern and Pollack 2012; Crewe and King 2013; Light 2014; Schuck 2014; Oppermann and Spencer 2016) followed. These works further imply that governments are up to no good, incompetent, politically paralysed, and/or chronically risk overreach much of the time (e.g. Scott 1998; Schuck 2014).

And yet in many parts of the world, across many public policy domains, the bulk of public projects, programmes, and services perform not so badly at all, and sometimes even quite successfully (Goderis 2015). These realities are chronically underexposed and understudied. Major policy accomplishments, striking performance in difficult circumstances, and thousands of taken-for-granted everyday forms of effective public value creation by and through governments are not deemed newsworthy. They cannot be exploited for political gain by oppositions and critics of incumbent office-holders. Curiously, academic students of public policy have had almost nothing to say about them (cf. Bovens et al. 2001; McConnell 2010; Moore 2013), despite vigorous calls to recognize the major and often hidden and unacknowledged contributions of governments to successes claimed by and widely attributed to now revered companies like Google (Mazzucato 2013).

We cannot properly ‘see’, let alone recognize and explain, variations in government performance when media, political, and academic discourses alike are saturated with accounts of their shortcomings and failures but remain nearly silent on their achievements. Negative language dominates: public and academic discourse about government, politics, and public policy is dominated by disappointment, incompetence, failure, unintended consequences, alienation, corruption, disenchantment, and crisis (Hay 2007). On the contrary, the manner in which we look at, talk about, think, evaluate, and emotionally relate to public institutions risks creating self-fulfilling prophecies. The current ascent of ‘anti-system’ populists speaks volumes, and the message is hardly reassuring. The ‘declinist’ discourse of the current age has permeated our thinking about government and public policy. It prevents us from seeing, acknowledging, and learning from past and present instances of highly effective and highly valued public policymaking.

With this book we want to shift the focus. We aim to infuse the agenda for teaching, research, and dialogue on public policymaking with food for thought about what goes well. We do this through a series of close-up, in-depth case study accounts of the genesis and evolution of stand-out public policy accomplishments, across a range of countries, sectors, and challenges. With these accounts, we engage with the conceptual, methodological, and theoretical challenges which have plagued and constrained researchers seeking to evaluate, explain, and design successful public policy.

There are many ways to ‘get at’ these questions. Existing conceptual and comparative studies of public policy success (Bovens et al. 2001; Patashnik 2008; McConnell 2010) suggest that achieving success entails two major tasks. One entails *craft work*: devising, adopting, and implementing programmes and reforms that have a meaningful impact on the public issues giving rise to their existence. The other entails *political work*: forming and maintaining coalitions of stakeholders to persuasively propagate these programmes. This political work extends

to nurturing and protecting elite and public perceptions of the policy's/programme's ideology, intent, instruments, implementation, and impact during the often long and tenuous road from ideas to outcomes. Success must be experienced and actively communicated, or it will go unnoticed and underappreciated. In this volume, we aim to shed light on how these two fundamental tasks—programme and process design; and coalition-building and reputation management—are taken up and carried out in instances of highly successful public policymaking.

Following in the footsteps of Pressman and Wildavsky and Hall, this volume contains in-depth case studies of prominent instances of public policymaking and planning from around the world. By offering insight into occurrences of policy success across varied contexts, these case studies are designed to increase awareness that government and public policy actually work remarkably well, at least some of the time, and that we can learn from these practices. Before we get into these cases, however, it is necessary to equip readers of this book and future researchers of policy success with a guide on how to go about identifying and analysing instances of policy success. The chief purpose of this chapter is to offer researchers, policy-makers, and students a field guide to spotting great policy successes in the real world—in the wild—so that we can begin to analyse how they came about and what might be learned from them.

How Do We Know a 'Great Policy Success' When We See One?

Policy successes are, like policy failures, in the eye of the beholder. They are not mere facts but stories. Undoubtedly 'events'—real impacts on real people—are a necessary condition for their occurrence. But in the end, policy successes do not so much occur as they are made. To claim that a public policy, programme, or project X is a 'success' is effectively an act of interpretation, indeed of framing. To say this in a public capacity and in a public forum makes it an inherently political act: it amounts to giving a strong vote of confidence to certain acts and practices of governance. In effect it singles them out, elevates them, validates them.

For such an act to be consequential, it needs to stick: others must be convinced of its truth and they need to emulate it. The claim 'X is a success' needs to become a more widely accepted and shared narrative. When it does, it becomes performative: X looks better and better because so many say so, so often. When the narrative endures, X becomes enshrined in society's collective memory through repeated retelling and other rituals. Examples of the latter include the conferral of awards on people or organizations associated with X, who then subsequently get invitations to come before captive audiences to spread the word; the high place that X occupies in rankings; the favourable judgements of X by official arbiters of public value in a society, such as audit agencies or watchdog bodies, not to mention the court of public opinion. Once they have achieved prominence,

success tales—no matter how selective and biased critics and soft voices may claim them to be (see Schram and Soss 2001)—come to serve as important artefacts in the construction of self-images and reputational claims of the policy-makers, governments, agencies, and societal stakeholders that credibly claim authorship of their making and preservation (Van Assche et al. 2012).

We must tread carefully in this treacherous terrain. Somehow, we need to arrive at a transparent and widely applicable conceptualization of ‘policy success’ to be deployed throughout this volume, and a basic set of research tools allowing us to spot and characterize the ‘successes’ which will be studied in detail throughout this book. To get there, we propose that *policy assessment is necessarily a multi-dimensional, multi-perspectivist, and political process*. At the most basic level we distinguish between two dimensions of assessment. First, the programmatic *performance* of a policy: success is essentially about designing smart programmes that will really have an impact on the issues they are supposed to tackle, while delivering those programmes in a manner to produce social outcomes that are valuable. There is also the political *legitimacy* of a policy: success is the extent to which both the social outcomes of policy interventions and also the manner in which they are achieved are seen as appropriate by relevant stakeholders and accountability forums in view of the systemic values in which they are embedded (Fischer 1995; Hough et al. 2010).

The relation between these two dimensions of policy evaluation is not straightforward. There can be (and often are) asymmetries: politically popular policies are not necessarily programmatically effective or efficient, and vice versa. Moreover, there is rarely one shared normative and informational basis upon which all actors in the governance processes assess performance, legitimacy, and endurance (Bovens et al. 2001). Many factors influence beliefs and practices through which people form judgements about governance. Heterogeneous stakeholders have varied vantage points, values, and interests with regard to a policy, and thus may experience and assess it differently. An appeal to ‘the facts’ does not necessarily help settle these differences. In fact, like policymaking, policy evaluation occurs in a context of multiple, often competing, cultural and political frames and narratives, each of which privileges some facts and considerations over others (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). It is inherently political in its approach and implications, no matter how deep the espoused commitment to scientific rigour of many of its practitioners. This is not something we can get around; it is something we have to acknowledge and be mindful of without sliding into thinking that it is *all and only* political, and that therefore ‘anything goes’ when it comes assessing the success or otherwise of a policy (Bovens et al. 2006).

Building upon Bovens and ‘t Hart’s programmatic–political dichotomy, McConnell (2010) added a third perspective, process success, to produce a three-dimensional assessment map. We have adapted this three-dimensional assessment for our purposes (see also Newman 2014) and added an

additional—*temporal*—dimension. Assessing policy success in this volume thus involves checking cases against the following four criteria families:

Programmatic assessment—This dimension reflects the focus of 'classic' evaluation research on policy goals, the theory of change underpinning it, and the selection of the policy instruments it deploys—all culminating in judgements about the degree to which a policy achieves valuable social impacts.

Process assessment—The focus here is on how the processes of policy design, decision-making, and delivery are organized and managed, and whether these processes contribute to both its technical problem-solving capacity (effectiveness and efficiency) and to its social appropriateness, and in particular the sense of procedural justice among key stakeholders and the wider public (Van den Bos et al. 2014).

Political assessment—This dimension assesses the degree to which policy-makers and agencies involved in driving and delivering the policy are able to build and maintain supportive political coalitions, and the degree to which policy-makers' association with the policy enhances their reputations. In other words, it examines both the political requirements for policy success and the distribution of political costs/benefits among the actors involved in it.

Endurance assessment—The fourth dimension adds a temporal perspective. We surmise that the success or otherwise of a public policy, programme, or project should be assessed not through a one-off snapshot but as a multi-shot sequence or episodic film ascertaining how its performance and legitimacy develop over time. Contexts change, unintended consequences emerge, surprises are thrown at history: robustly successful policies are those that adapt to these dynamics through institutional learning and flexible adaptation in programme (re)design and delivery, and through political astuteness in safeguarding supporting coalitions and maintaining public reputation and legitimacy.

Taking these dimensions into account, we propose the following definition of a ('great') policy success:

A policy is a complete success to the extent that (a) it demonstrably creates widely valued social outcomes; through (b) design, decision-making, and delivery processes that enhance both its problem-solving capacity and its political legitimacy; and (c) sustains this performance for a considerable period of time, even in the face of changing circumstances.

Table 1.1 presents an assessment framework that integrates these building blocks. Articulating specific elements of each dimension of success—programmatic, process, political, endurance—in unambiguous and conceptually distinct terms, this framework lends a structure to both contemporaneous evaluation and dynamic consideration of policy developments over time. All contributing authors have drawn upon it in analysing their case studies in this volume.

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